

A Fawcett Publication

Monte Hale

WESTERN

10¢ NO. 77 OCT.



BULLET! WILD HORSES! FLYING FISTS!

DEATH RIGS THE RODEO!

MORE THRILLS PLUS
LAUGHS WITH
GABBY HAYES!



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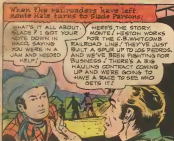


MONTE HALE

in STAGECOACH TRAIL



When ruthless Red Heston drove his broad-backed stage-coach over the Los Pecos ridge, it meant war between the railroaders and Glade Parsons' Concord stage line! Both Heston and Parsons were tough products of the frontier, where a man had to be made of granite to survive and steel to win! When two such men clashed, bullets were bound to fly! And that was just what greeted Monte Hale when he rode up into Junction City!



Slade Parsons' coach is a Concord--made by skilled craftsmen--of the finest of woods, for decades, until the railroad came, it had been the king of the western highways. Now, as it hurtles along the trail leading out of Junction City ---

YOU'RE MAKING GOOD TIME, SLADE! HOW DOES HEISTON'S ROUTE COMPARE TO YOURS?

IT'S LONGER! I GO OVER SOME MOUNTAIN ROADS THAT THEY COULDN'T BUILD THE RAILROAD LINE ALONG! THAT'S WHY I THINK I'VE GOT A GOOD CHANCE!



WE'RE UP IN THE FOOTHILLS, NOW! AND \$2 FARE--SO GOOD!



But then, taking the trail, ahead---

STAGECOACH COMES!!

GIVE SIGNAL, WAPANTA--AND WE STRIKE!



LOOK! COMANCHOS SHOOTING DOWN ON US!

AND THEY'VE GOT THE ROAD BLOCKED! WE CAN'T GET THROUGH!



AMISHH! MY ARM!



NICE SHOOTING, MONTE!

THAT DOES IT! THEY'RE KIDNAPING--OOP!



KEEP YOUR GUN READY--AND HOLD THEM AT A DISTANCE! I AM TO HAVE A WAR PARLAY WITH ONE OF THOSE INDIANS!

BE CAREFUL, MONTE!







THEY'RE
PASSING
US! WE'VE
GOT TO
CATCH UP!

IT'S NO USE, SLADE!
THE LOCOMOTIVE IS
JUST FASTER THAN
YOUR HORSES ON
A STRAIGHT STREET!
THERE'S NOTHING
YOU CAN DO
ABOUT IT!



And Monte is right--
for the C.A.W. Whitcomb locomotive
pulls into Los Pecos
with a comfortable
lead.



WHEE! WHEE! YOU FELLERS
MADE PRETTY GOOD
TIME, PASSONS! BUT
NOT QUITE GOOD
ENOUGH, EH, BOYS?

NOT
ENOUGH
TO WIN
THE RACE,
HESTON!



BUT
THEN--

HOLD ON, HESTON!
HERE COMES YOUR
SIDEKICK, KEELEY!
HOW COME HE'S NOT
RIDING WITH YOU?
AND HOW COME THOSE
SADDLE BAGS ARE
FILLED WITH WHAT
LOOKS LIKE--



-- DOWNHILL! SO YOU
WEREN'T CONTENTED WITH
BRINGING A BAND OF
COMANCHES TO STOP US,
EH, HESTON? YOU HAD TO
SEND THIS GUNSEL OUT
TO SLOW A MOUNTAIN DOWN
ON OUR ROAD! WE DIDN'T
HAVE THE PROOF ON YOU
BEFORE, BUT NOW WE DO!



THAT'S ENOUGH, HALE!
SO GET 'EM, BOYS!
WE'LL CLOSE THEIR
BLABBERING MOUTHS
FOREVER!

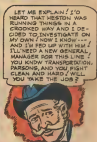
WE'LL
DEACONATE
THEM,
BOSS!



AAAAH!
MY
SHOULDER!



MY ARM!
IT'S NUMB--
CAN'T FEEL
A THING!





THIS IS THE REAL WILD WEST!

WE'VE GOT A SQUAD OF DOBBLE DOBBLE ABABO!

IS ON JUST WAIT!

CRASH! THROW DOWN THAT BOX OF DOBBLE DOBBLE OR WE'LL TELL YOU!

HOPE WE DON'T RUN INTO ANY BANDITS!

POP!

YIPPEE!

POO SAVED OUR DOBBLE DOBBLE!

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

FLEER'S DOBBLE DOBBLE IS MY SHOOTER!

FLEER'S DOBBLE DOBBLE IS THE REAL BUBBLE GUM!

LONGER-LASTING, SWEETER FLAVOR!

FUNNIES, FACTS, AND FORTUNES, TOO!

HAVE FUN WITH GUM!

1¢

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FLEER CO. INC.

disgusted

DILBERT

(SIGH, SIGH)

WHAT'S THE MATTER, DILBERT? WHAT ARE YOU SO GROSS IN THE MOUTH ABOUT?

(SIGH) IT'S ON ACCOUNT OF MY DAUGHTER!

YOUR DAUGHTER!

(SIGH) YES! YOU KNOW HOW SHE LIKES TO BUY EXPENSIVE HATS ALL THE TIME?

YES!

WELL, YESTERDAY SHE CAME HOME WITH SOMETHING NEW IN HATS... NO FLOWERS, NO STRAW, NO BRIM!

HUNT NO FLOWERS, NO STRAW, NO BRIM?

THAT'S RIGHT... JUST A PRICE TAG HANGING OVER ONE EAR!

!!!



AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM CAPTAIN MARVEL!

BOYS AND GIRLS—THE POLIO SEASON MAY BE COMING AROUND AGAIN SOON. IF YOU WANT TO KEEP AS STRONG AND HEALTHY AS I AM, BE SURE AND FOLLOW THESE RULES...



**DON'T
GET CHILLED!**



**DON'T
GET OVERTIRED!**



**DON'T
MIX WITH
NEW GROUPS!**

**BUT
DO
KEEP
CLEAN!**



THESE POLIO PRECAUTIONS ARE RECOMMENDED BY THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR INFANTILE PARALYSIS!



**EARLY
SETTLER!**



WHAT WAS ALL THAT MOISE SPOKE ON IN THE YARD BEFORE, BETSY?

LITTLE JOHNNY AND SUE FROM THE NEXT BRANCH WERE HAVING AN ARGUMENT!



YIKES, WHAT ABOUT?

THEY WERE ARGUING OVER WHICH SHOULD HAVE THE BIGGEST HALF OF THEIR APPLE!



IS THAT SO?

YEP! AND I HAD TO SETTLE IT!



MOVED! AND WHOSE PART DID YOU TAKE?

WELL...



...I TOOK BOTH THEIR PARTS!



MONTE HALE

DEATH
RIGS THE
RODEO

HOLD ON, KANSAS! I'LL GET YOU OUT OF THIS JAM...OR DIE TRYING!

MONTE! HORSE... GOT... ME... IN GROOVE... PASSING OUT!

Blackie Mason had the odds all figured! His All-Star rodeo was rigged so that no outsider could win the \$5,000 Grand Prize! Only the rodeo's ace rider, Milo Lawson, could come out the cheap bronze-buster. Neither Blackie nor Lawson cared what the cost was—just so it was in other men's lives! But there was one man who did care... the giant hero of the West, Monte Hale!

One day in Spar Valley, as two Cowboys knock at a ranch house door—

ER, MONTE! ARE YOU SURE YOU'VE GOT THE RING?

FOR THE THIRD TIME, YES! NOW TAKE IT EASY, JIM! HERE WE GO!

JIM! IT'S YOU!

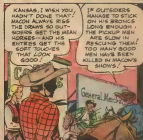
IT SURE IS, SALLY! AND THIS BIG HORSE IS MONTE HALE, A SIBBON OF MINE! WHEN MONTE HEARD WE WERE GOING TO BE MARKED, HE VOLUNTEERED TO BE MY BEST MAN!

WELCOME TO OUR RANCH, MONTE! THIS IS MY DAD, KANSAS BLOUNT.

SEEMS I'VE HEARD YOUR NAME, SIR! WEREN'T YOU AN ACE RODEO RIDER?

I SURE WAS, YOUNG FELLER! WORLD'S CHAMP BRONC-BUSTER! AND I RECKON I COULD STEEL WIN MY SHARE OF EVENTS... IF I HADN'T QUIT RIDING!





LET ME WORRY ABOUT THAT! I WAS ONCE A CHAMP--AND I STILL AM, COMPARED TO YOU HOLLYWOODERS! AND AS FOR YOU, JIM-- I FORBID SALLY TO MARRY YOU, LESS-SHE WANTS TO, BE DISOBEYED!



The rodeo begins, with a big parade!

BOO--YIPPEE-- HERE THEY COME!

MONTE, I'M WORRIED ABOUT DAD! IF MACON'S RODEO IS AS CROOKED AS YOU SAY--MONT HE BE HURT?

I HOPE NOT, SALLY! JIM AND I WILL KEEP A CLOSE WATCH TO PREVENT TROUBLE!



Then, with a huge crowd cheering each contestant, the rodeo begins. First, the calf-roping!



Then the bulldozing--and then the bronc-busting! The first rider is Milo Lawson, Maccon's entry!



FAN HIM, MISTER! KAKE HIM! THAT'S STICKING TO HIM!

RIPPEE!

RIDE HIM, MILO!

HIGH RIDE, PELLA!

IT'S YOUR TURN NOW, KANSAS!



As Kansas Blount lowers himself onto the mean black stallion that the chute hands call suicide--

HEAR THAT? ITS THE OLD-TIME CHAMP--KANSAS BLOUNT!

GO GET 'EM, KANSAS! SHOW 'EM WHAT WE OLD FELLERS CAN DO!



THERE HE GOES!

THAT HOSS IS A WILD ONE! WHAT A RIDE! STAY ON HIM, KANSAS!





The competition goes on--this time with Jim Shaw and Milo Lawson battling for top riding honors!



That night--

DAD'S IN THE HOSPITAL--- AND THEY SAY HE'LL RECOVER EASILY! AND MEANWHILE, YOU'RE DOING A WONDERFUL JOB ON THOSE MEAN BRONCS, JIM! HE'LL BE MIGHTY HAPPY WHEN HE HEARS YOU TOOK HIS PLACE!

MAYBE SO, SALLY! BUT I'M WAITING FOR BLACKIE MACON TO PULL A TRICK ON ME TO KEEP ME FROM WINNING!



JIM'S RIGHT, SALLY! IN FACT I AM TO SHADOW MACON'S TENT TONIGHT TO SEE IF I CAN FIND OUT WHAT HE'S UP TO!



And later, Macon and Milo Lawson get together ---

HELO, THAT BLASTED SHAW IS GOING TOO GOOD! I DON'T AIM TO HAVE HIM RUN OFF WITH THE GRAND PRIZE! SUPPOSE YOU TAKE THIS PACKET OF POWDER AND SLIP IT INTO HIS COFFEE TOMORROW--BEFORE THE BIG EVENT!



GOOD ENOUGH, BLACKIE! IF THE POWDER DOES THE TRICK WE WON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT!

SO THAT'S IT! THOSE WANKERS ARE PLANNING TO GROSS JIM TO PREVENT HIM FROM WINNING THE LAST BRONC-BUSTING EVENT! DO BETTER THAN JIM, PRONTO!



Next morning, an overflow crowd has gathered to witness the exciting finale!



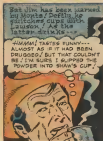
HOW IT'S BETWEEN JIM SHAW AND MILO LAWSON! LET'S GET GOING!

COME ON, BLACKIE! START THE SHOW!

AWAY, JIM! WELL, NO HARD FEELINGS ABOUT US FIGHTING IT OUT FOR THE GRAND PRIZE, I HOPE! HERE, HAVE A CUP OF COFFEE!



THANKS, MILO! I BEGON! I'LL TASTE GOOD!









END OF A BADMAN

By Hank Spector



JUD KARNEY'S thoughts were as uneasy as the motion of the lurching stagecoach from which he looked out at the rugged Arizona landscape. This was a part of the country that was new to him. Perhaps here he would be able to make a fresh start. Any of his former acquaintances, seeing him now, would grin over the sober black suit, the white shirt and the string tie. But even a stranger could tell that the blue-eyed, young man was unaccustomed to his city finery, that his jacket was tight across the wide shoulders, that the high-heeled boots were those of a horseman, and that the bulge under each side of the respectable coat indicated a law slung six-gun.

The other passenger in the coach, a short, fat drummer, chattered on unheeded. Jud stiffened, as words suddenly bit into his consciousness. "... some bad bombs drifting around these parts. This is a tough town we're coming to." Jud groaned inwardly. He had had enough of tough towns. Most of his life had been spent in the wild region along the border, where a man had to be unusually quick, or quick with his guns, in order to survive. And meekness had never been one of Jud Karney's main attributes.

The drummer turned toward him speculative eyes, and pursed his round lips. "There's been talk of a new sheriff coming in," he continued. "Maybe you're him. You look as if you'd be sort of handy with a six-gun."

Jud stirred uneasily. "I don't like shooting," he said. "I don't like trouble." Which, in a way, was true. He did not like the kind of trouble that seemed to follow a gunman. To avoid it, he was running away from his own reputation. He came from a part of Texas where a man carried the law in his own forty-five. From the time he'd been old enough to pull on his boots, he had learned to buckle on a gunbelt as well. Then, as he grew up, his skill with guns increased, year after year, and he began to achieve a sort of local fame. Suddenly, he came to the realization that he was known not just as Jud Karney, but as a gunman, and as such, a potential killer. He knew how such careers inevitably went. Badmen, in search of notori-

ety, picked fights with you. And if you survived, you became a badman yourself.

The coach groaned to a halt at the foot of a hill, and the passengers alighted. They coiled up the rocky roadway behind the coach, the drummer in the lead, puffing heavily. Suddenly Jud's arm streaked to his side, and there was the almost simultaneous sound of a snake's rattle and the crash of a gun. The drummer whirled around to see his coach companion holding a smoking revolver. A decapitated rattlesnake was writhing in the dust, practically at the little man's feet.

The drummer mopped cold sweat from his brow while he overwhelmed Jud with his thanks. But Jud was now even more withdrawn. He was sure that this little man would embroider the tale and tell it all over the town. Jud had intended to look for work, and if things were as raw here as the drummer had said they were, he knew what kind of work would gravitate toward him now. He had wanted to begin as a cow wrangler and then maybe move up to become a deputy, and perhaps eventually a sheriff, or even a government marshal. Then his skill with guns would be an honorable thing, upholding the law. But now, the new sheriff would probably be suspicious of him and order him to keep moving.

Jud liked the looks of the place, too, when they finally rolled into the town's main street. The board sidewalks were wide and clean and there was a look of respectable solidity about many of the stores and houses. After a washup and a meal, Jud lay on his bed in the cool, dim hotel room, looking up at the ceiling. Towards sundown he would go down and inquire about a job. Maybe he could attach to an outfit and move out of town before the drummer spread the story about his shooting.

Suddenly, his door was flung open with a crash. Jud sat up, regarding the man who stood belligerently in the doorway. He was dark, a few years older than Jud, shorter, and much heavier. His narrowed eyes flicked over the room, taking in Jud's gunbelt which hung over a chair.

"I didn't hear myself invite you in," Jud

said, "but since you're already in, have a seat."
"I'm not staying long," the man replied.
"And neither are you."

Jud's face remained impassive, but his muscles tensed. Here it was again. The local bully-boys, whatever their game, didn't want any formidable strangers around. But he had no wish to enter into their quarrels. "I like it here," he said pleasantly. "Maybe you misunderstand my motive for coming to this place."

The man strode into the room, took Jud's coat off the hook where it had been hung carefully, and threw it contemptuously into Jud's face. "Take your rage and get going," he sneered.

Jud's temper flared into white heat. He had meant to explain things, or to leave peacefully if he had to. But now he flung the coat aside and came off the bed in a rush. The man's hand was suddenly holding a six-gun. Jud stepped back, and sat down again on the bed, breathing hard.

The man chuckled nastily. "Cooled off fast, didn't you?" he taunted. "Maybe this town won't be the way you expected to find it." His words suddenly lashed out. "I'm giving you small sundown to clear out. After that I'll be gunning for you!"

Jud looked at him steadily, his anger now coldly retained. "I don't know who you are and I don't care," he said. "But nobody runs me out of anyplace. I aim to spend this evening downstairs, in the barroom. I don't know why you choose to pick a fight with me, but if you want one, I'll give it to you!"

After the man had left, Jud lay back and watched the shadows move across the ceiling. It seemed like such a nice town. Too bad. After tonight's gunfight he wouldn't be able to get a job here. The new sheriff would probably make him leave. That is, if he survived.

Several hours later, Jud rose from his bed. He buckled on his gunbelt and went downstairs. People drew away from him as he walked up to the bar. He could feel in the air the electric tension that always preceded trouble.

He stood at the bar alone, toying with a glass of milk, glancing from time to time into the huge mirror that reflected the room behind him. A hush fell over the room as the swinging doors parted, revealing the swarthy gunslinger. The man was wearing his guns, tied down to his thighs. Jud was wearing his guns, too, with no coat now to hamper his movements.

The man took several paces into the room, then stopped. His voice rang out arrogantly. "Get out of town, stranger! You're not wanted here!"

Jud turned slowly, moving away from the bar to give himself plenty of elbow room. "I'd rather stay," he said quietly. "I favor law and order. But go ahead and draw."

The man's eyes flickered with indecision. An opponent who lets you draw first must be pretty sure of himself. Then he shrugged, seemed to draw himself together, and his right hand swept up with his gun.

A thought flashed through Jud's mind — "This is going to be tough, because I want to avoid killing him." Then the two guns exploded with a single, overlapping roar.

Jud stood taut, rebelling the sordid gunsmoke. The other man clutched at his shoulder and let his gun fall to the floor. Then he slid down to collapse on top of it.

Jud turned to face the crowd. So far, so good. The new sheriff, wherever he was, must have heard the shots, and would be putting in an appearance now.

The little drummer separated himself from the crowd and came toward Jud with beaming face and outstretched hand. "Let me congratulate you, Sheriff," he said. "You took care of him in fine style, as I knew you would."

Jud was certain that he had not heard the man correctly. But others crowded around, slapping his back, shaking his hand, talking in loud, excited voices.

"Maybe we'll have some real law and order around here now," one of them said.

"Yes," added another, "with Hoskins down, the rest of the gang won't be so hungry for trouble."

"That Hoskins was always one bad hombre," the drummer said. "When I told him that the new sheriff had come in with me on the stage-coach, he said that he would run him out of town pronto."

A middle-aged, mustached individual shoved himself to the fore and introduced himself as the mayor.

"But I'm no sheriff," Jud protested in bewilderment. "I'm just a rider, looking for work."

THE MAYOR leaned toward him, with a conspiratorial wink. "I know, son," he whispered. "I got a telegram from the prospective sheriff this morning, declining the job. But if you'll just sneak around to my office when nobody is watching, I'll let you have the star."

"Ma, sheriff?" Jud asked.

"The job is yours, if you want it," the Mayor said. "We need a man like you."

"And I need a town like this," Jud said fervently. "I'm your man!"

THE END

...AND WHENEVER THERE'S ANY DANGER, I'M ALWAYS COOL AND CALM! YUH! NEVER FIND GABBY HAYES ON THE SCENE OF A DILEMMA!

GABBY HAYES

in **BULL** in **CHINA SHOPPE**

CHINA SHOPPE

GABBY HAYES MAY NOT BE EXACTLY A WOMAN, BUT WHENEVER THERE'S A FAIR DILEMMA, IN DISTRESS, OUR HERO IS ALWAYS READY TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

Well, Gabby says, a woman may blame me for being wrong! He knows about the old stage road between Rancho and Salado Pools.

HOW LET ME SEE IF I'VE GOT IT STRAIGHT... THE SUN RISES IN THE WEST AND SETS IN THE EAST!

His thoughts are interrupted by a strange sight.

JEEPERS! WHAT ARE YOU TWO FELLOWS DOING DOWN THERE IN THAT TREE?

WE'RE NOT PICKING GOOSEBERRIES, BUSTER!

WHENPOOP, RIDE THAT BURNING FAST AS YOU CAN TO THE BUSTED BOTTOM RANCH!

TELL THE FOREMAN THAT HIS WILD BULL, PERPO, IS LOOSE AND ON THE RAMPAGE!

LOOK! HE'S HEADING AWAY FROM THE RANCH!

—GROAN— MIGHT HAVE KNOWN IT! THAT'S WRONG! WHENPOOP HE NEVER GOES THE RIGHT WAY!

MONTE HALE WESTERN







MONTE HALE

THE RETURN OF THE RANGERS.

In the annals of America's past, the gallant tradition of the Texas Rangers has never been surpassed. But what use was courage when Captain Rod Simms and his Lone Star buddies fell into a no-escape shotgun ambush at the hands of killer Mulvey and the Gravediggers? Justice seemed to have disappeared from West Texas--until Monte Hale drew his coils to set the score straight--Ranger style!

IT'S MONTE HALE!
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

NO! THE OIL BARRELS!
THEY'RE EXPLODING!!

Three Texas Rangers, led by Captain Rod Simms, rise on a nocturnal mission!

SO YOU THINK THE GRAVEDIGGER IS HOLED UP IN THE SILVER CARTWHEEL SALOON IN BODDOSA, EH, ROD?

ACCORDING TO THIS ANONYMOUS LETTER I RECEIVED, HE IS! IT'S WORTH FOLLOWING UP IF WE CAN LOCATE THAT KID-CRAZY BANNY!

HERE'S THE TOWN NOW! AND THERE'S THE SILVER CARTWHEEL, CAP!

LET'S NOT BE TOO FORMAL, GENTS! IF WE KNOCK AT THE DOOR, THE HONORS WERE VINTING MAY, VAMMOORE!

INSTEAD, LET'S HAVE A QUIET ENTRANCE -- LIKE THIS!





In the cemetery outside of Pinedora, late at night...

HURR! SEEMS TO ME I CAN HEAR SOMEONE PAST THOSE GRAVES UP AHEAD!



IT'S HITTING SOMETHING! MUST BE THE COFFIN!

HOLD ON! DROP THAT SHOVEL PROKTO AND GRAB BAX WATER!



WH-WHO ARE YOU, STRANGER?

MY HANDLE'S MONTE HALE! BUT SUPPOSE YOU TELL ME WHO YOU ARE, AND WHAT YOU'RE DOING HERE! YOU LOOK TOO YOUNG TO BE ROBBINS GRAVES!



I'M DANNY SUMS! IT WAS MY BROTHER, RANGER BOB SUMS, WHO WAS KILLED IN THE CARTWHEEL SALOON A WHILE BACK! I DON'T BELIEVE THAT HE WAS KILLED FIGHTING WITH THE OTHER RANGERS! AND I WANTED TO FIND OUT THE TRUTH BY EXAMINING HIS BODY!



THIS MAY SEEM STRANGE TO YOU, DANNY, BUT I'M HERE ON EXACTLY THE SAME ERRAND! I KNEW ONE OF THOSE OTHER RANGERS--AND I HAVE MY DOUBTS ABOUT THE STORY NIKK HULVEY TOLD OF HIS DEATH, TOO.



Slowly, grimly, Monte pries the coffin lid off! He and Danny Sums leap forward, and see---

MONTE: THEY'VE ALL BEEN SHOT FROM OVERHEAD--AND FROM THE SIDE!

YOU'RE RIGHT! WHICH MEANS THAT THEY WEREN'T KILLED IN A FACE-TO-FACE FIGHT! THEY WERE MOWED DOWN IN AN AMBUSH!



Days later...in the Cardshack Saloon, a drunken winner reels in!

HOW 'BOUT A DRINK, BARTENDER? I'M MIGHTY THIRSTY!

KEEP YOUR SHOTS ON, WINNER! YOU'LL BE SERVED!



As the winner waits his eager room, the walls and floor of the gambling saloon. And, through his disguise, we begin to see the familiar features of MONTE HALE!

HEAR! THAT WALL LOOKS AS IF A SHOTGUN BLAST HIT IT JUST RECENTLY! AND THE PELLET CAME FROM ABOVE! PROBABLY FROM THAT BALCONY! NOW TO SEE IF I CAN PICK UP ANY CLUES FROM WHAT THE FOLKS IN THE SALOON ARE SAYING!

WITELY
NO
CREDIT



I HEAR THAT MURPHY AND HIS OWLHOOTS HAVE BEEN CLEANING UP PLENTY IN THAT PROTECTION RACKET OF HIS!

YOU'VE BEEN HEARING THE TRUTH! SINCE THOSE RANGERS GUNNED EACH OTHER DOWN, HE HADN'T HAD TO WORRY ABOUT THE LAW--AND HE'S BEEN EARNING HIGH!



THE PRICES ARE FITTING TOGETHER! MIKE MULVEY WANTED THE RANGERS OUT OF THE WAY...AND THOSE BULLET HOLES IN THE WALL SURE LOOK AS IF HE HAD AN AMBUSH KIDNED! BUT WOULD HE DARE TO DO THE JOB HIMSELF...OR DID HE HAVE A TRIGGER MAN?



Monte's question is answered, as he peers on the balcony above--

THAT HATCHET-FACED HOMER ON THE BALCONY, HE'S DRESSED IN REGULAR CLOTHES, BUT I'D KNOW HIM ANYWHERE! HE'S THE GRAVEDIGGER! I'D BETTER TRY TO SLIP OUT OF HERE!



But the Gravedigger also has keen eyes!

THAT MINK! I'VE SEEN HIM BEFORE! IT'S MONTE HALE, SPYING ON MULVEY AND ME! I'LL FIX THAT!



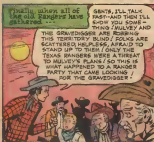
BANG!
CRASH!

CAN'T STAY TO FIGHT NOW! THE DOGS ARE TOO HEAVY! I'LL SEE IF I CAN FIND THE BACK WAY OUT!



NOT EXACTLY A GRACEFUL EXIT... BUT I CAN'T AFFORD TO BE CHOOSY! PARDNER! HERE, BOY!





But back at the silver Cartwheel--

GRAVEDIGGER, I DON'T LIKE IT! IF HALE REALLY SPOTTED YOU, HE'LL BE BACK! AND THIS TIME HE WON'T BE ALONE! HE'LL BRING UP AN ARMY!

I'VE GOT AN IDEA THAT'LL TAKE CARE OF THAT!

LET'S CARRY THESE BARRELS OF OIL OUT TO THE MAIN STREET! WE'LL BURY THEM UNDER ITS SURFACE WHEN IT'S NIGHT AND NO ONE CAN SEE US!

WHAT GOOD WILL THAT DO?

PLENTY! WE'LL LAY A POWDER FUSE FROM EACH BURIED BARREL OF OIL TO THE SALOON! WHEN HALE AND HIS BUDDIES COME RIDING UP, WE'LL TOUGH OFF THE FUSERS-- AND THEY'LL GO BOOM! SMART, EH?

GRAVEDIGGER, I GOT TO HAND IT TO YOU! NOBODY'LL EVER KNOW WHAT HAPPENED!

Yes, the Gravedigger is mighty clever, but Monte Hale is also famous for his savvy!

REIN UP, GENTS! THE GRAVEDIGGER AND MRS. MULVEY MAY BE EXPECTING US THIS TIME, AND THEY'VE PROBABLY PLANNED ANOTHER AMBUSH!

SO WHAT DO WE DO, MONTE?

WHAT THEY WON'T EXPECT! WE'LL ENTER THE SALOON THROUGH THE REAR WINDOWS, AND WE'LL PLUSH THEM OUT THE FRONT WAY!

So as the badmen watch eagerly, through the shattered front windows, Monte and the others enter through the REAR!

SHHH! QUIET!

I'M DOING MY BEST, MONTE--BUT THESE OLD BONES OF MINE KEEP CREAKING!

THEN--

LOOK! THEY'VE ENTERED THROUGH THE REAR! BLAST THEM!

THEY'VE SPOTTED US! RUN 'EM BACK, BOYS!

WE MAY BE OLD, MONTE, BUT WE CAN STILL SHOOT-- BETTERN EVER!

KEE-RECK! ONCE A RANGER, ALWAYS A RANGER!

AAGGH! MY HAND--





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